

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

TEACHER: LESSON 3

THEME: YOU CHOOSE THE RULES! WHICH RIGHTS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Assign students to small groups. The optimum size would be three or four. Give them STUDENT LESSON THREE. Decide in advance whether you want this to be done solely in class, or prepared out of class and then presented in class (outside preparation allows for creation of better supportive arguments and materials.) If you choose to assign the preparation as homework, consider encouraging students to poll adults (family, friends) for a variety of ideas before settling on one.

Consider choosing a group facilitator and a recorder for each group. Decide if you want each member of a delegation to present a part of their group's case or if one person from the group should present it all. Before presentations, decide how to arrange the room so each group can have visual access to all members and can use technology if needed. Don't forget to reserve/set up the technology that is needed.

Determine a process for establishing the order of presentations AND for class voting on the most compelling case.

You will want to explain the term "coup d'etat" which students will encounter in their lesson. You may want to also consider some reward for the group that is chosen. This could be something of your own design, computer-generated, or any other affirmation for a job well done.

SETTING THE STAGE:

Most children in this nation are reared in a democratic "bubble." All rights are assumed and inherited by them, so not much thought is required about how things could be different.

In the way of analogy, we all appreciate our thumbs MUCH more when the use of one is lost because of a hammer accident. Similarly, we can help students appreciate freedoms more by asking them to envision their loss.

Students love to role-play and have a keen sense of imagination. This activity plays into students' creative abilities while demanding some serious and critical venturing "outside their bubble."

ACTIVITY: THEATER OF THE MIND

In a land not so far away, and not so long ago, there lived people in a small, democratic nation with a constitution like ours. However, that nation has just been taken over by a coup d'etat, and is now a dictatorship of one. Not wanting to alienate the people totally, the new leader has announced that ALL prior protected liberties will be removed in the new Constitution, ALL EXCEPT ONE, which the ruler will honor. It is up to the people to tell the ruler which right to retain. Each region of the nation is sending a delegation to a conference; the delegates will vote on which right to protect based on the best argument. The people of your region have chosen your group to represent them and trust your judgment.

Your task is to decide, as a delegation, what liberty or right you LEAST want every citizen to lose. Prepare a case for why that freedom is, in your view, the most essential to protecting the people from absolute dictatorship. Be prepared to present this argument to the conference (class) as a whole in a 4-5 minute oral argument. The use of examples from history is encouraged, as is the use of supportive materials of your own creation (audio or videotapes, overheads, posters, banners, handouts, slides, etc.).

When each delegation has presented its case, the conference will deliberate aloud on the merits of each case, then vote on which liberty/right AND supportive arguments it chooses to present to the new government.

Debrief:

After the presentations, ask the students to share which liberty or right they look at in a new way. Is there a freedom they value more after this exercise? Why? It will be interesting to see how many groups choose some form of "free expression."

If no group chose "voting" as the most essential for its case, ask students to discuss what role the right to vote might play in avoiding tyranny by a government.

Ask the students to rank order all the freedoms and rights presented in the order of how vital each is in safeguarding "rule by the people."